

GRAPHITE
—AND—
GALENA

MARJORIE McKENZIE

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Graphite and Galena

By
Marjorie McKenzie

Ottawa, Canada
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By

MARJORIE McKENZIE

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TRANSLUCENCIES

(To J. W. McK.)

When you were far away,
And I lay all alone and thought of you,
I called you by the sweetest names I knew.
Caresses I would hardly dare
To say out loud when you were there
I breathed into the unresponding air
At close of day.

When you returned to me,
Real and warm, I left them all unsaid:
Light, laughing words rose to my lips instead,
For there are thoughts too dear and true
To utter, between me and you;
And yet—sometimes, I think, they all shine
through,
And both may see.

CHAMPLAIN AT LAKE NIPISSING

Champlain, the earliest follower of the trail,
Walked by the lonely lakeside, to commune
With night's deep silences. The fair broad
moon

O'er the stars' faces cast a filmy veil
Of softening light; the water, gleaming pale
Or glooming inky, stretched away, and soon
Was lost in dusky air; at times a loon
Sent through the misty space his quivering
wail.

And Champlain, gazing, felt his trouble cease,
And courage came to face the path untrod
As yet, that lay ahead of him. The night
Yielded her inmost secret to his sight:
He felt once more the presence of his God,
And that great presence filled his soul with
peace.

EXPLORERS

Idly drowse the canoes on the shelving sand;
Pitched the tent, and the fire is flickering
clear;

But westward wanders over the waters sheer
A golden trail to a far, haunting land,

Where the wizard firs stand higher, denser,
fragrant,

Where the lichened rocks are veined with
glittering ore,

Where streams through deep-soiled meadows
go loitering vagrant,

Or full to the brim the plunging cataracts
roar.

Close on the verge of the world it waits and
listens

For a paddle-dip, for a shoe-pack's crunch-
ing tread;

Bright on the broad horizon its promise glis-
tens—

To-morrow's country, the land that lies
ahead. . . .

— See there! A wild-fowl arrowhead swims
along the sky.

There is frost in the air, and the hunter's
moon is waning.

Short and precious and few are the days re-
maining,
And out of the forest echoes a soundless cry.

Scores of lonesome, lost little lakes are call-
ing,
And lurking rivers that dodge by devious
ways:

"Find us, follow us, learn where our secrets
lie."

But over the sunset broods a deepening haze,
And down from the boughs the last red leaves
are falling.

BEFORE THE DARK CAME

Every muscle alive
With a panther's lissom power,
He poised again for the dive
At the end of his last good hour.

The ripples were sparkling clear
To the west wind's wayward will;
But down at the foot of the pier
It was dark and smooth and still.

In gallant and careless grace,
With a seabird's easy power,
He flashed to the water's face
And the end of his last good hour.

THE HOUR APPOINTED

Softly, with all despatch,
I slip down the dingy stair;
No listening ear must catch
The click of a closing latch
Rippling the still night air.

Drowned deep in a moony daze,
The fields lie open and free;
Where the spruce-wood's girdling maze
Blots through a creamy haze
There is one that waits for me.

Sun-tanned, thin-scented grass:
Like matting it answers the tread.
Through the moonshine's clouded glass,
Are there eyes that mark where I pass?—
Behind me—like red-hot brass?—
Like clear hill-springs, ahead?

Oh, dreams that never can happen
Are coming to pass to-night!
There's a capering under the alders,
By the fireflies' elvish light;
Strange powers are hovering, wheeling,
In airy, opaline rings;
And away down deep within me
Is something that laughs and sings:

For the final cast is made,
And now, let follow who dare!
There's a watcher ready and ware
Where the feathery shadows are falling,
And years of a hope delayed,
And longings no more to be stayed
Converge to the trysting there,
And the enterprise that is calling.

FLUSH OF SUNRISE

What's he like?

Spring water?

Ruddier, spicier.

Wine?

He is more austere and pure.

A star?

Perhaps, but warmer, friendlier.

A hearth-fire?

Remoter, more enduring —

God! enduring?

Does anything endure?

THE SENSIBLE CHAUFFEUR

I don't want to be dreaming about her.

As long as I drive her every day,

there's no need to dream of her at night,

And when I leave her at last, there'll be no
use dreaming.

FOREBODING

If you should die to-day, the world would
seem

A banquet-board for one in fever spread,
Its spices tasteless, all its dainties lead;
A shaft that missed the mark; a failing
gleam;

As to the brainsick beast a sparkling stream;
A symphony played to an aching head;
A plague-swept town, whence men still clean
are fled;

A weary, profitless, unending dream.

Oh, doubtless this with time would wear
away:

Folks eat, and work, and sleep; beauty and
fun

Beset us; and we grieve not overmuch.
Ever with darkness alternates the day.
The beggar-man in June sits in the sun,
Whistles a tune, and clean forgets his crutch.

REBEL FUTILITY

That unguessed sea!

Lone and aloof it lies,
And far beyond this sphere of dusty seeming
Where groping men be wise,
Where shattered glass and gold-of-fools lie
gleaming.
The cleansing sunlight, vainly earthward
streaming,
Caresses it with kinswoman's love;
But neither thrill within nor surge above
Responds to human cries.

And here—the endless swarm,
Stifed and struggling, strive to grasp the
boundless,
Unsatisfied with form;
Following ever, querulous or soundless,
Fireflies that drift over morasses ground-
less,
Footprints of hope that lead to long de-
spair;
Held by a dream that drives them, none
knows where,
As hail, driven by the storm.

Ah! could some cooling rain
Descend and lay these furies of devotion
Still, or a sigh profane
Stir the dead depths of that too tranquil
ocean!

But madly onward rages earth's commotion,
And silently, in blank, eternal sleep,
The unplumbed fastnesses their solace
keep
Safe from our prying pain.

ICICLES

From the shed's eaves stream
Cold, still, silvery,
Downward-tending water-flames,
Talon-tipped, claw-sprouting,
Prong-horned or needle-keen;
Bulging and wrinkling
In ripples fantastic;
Grotesque, demoniac:

Spearheads of Jötuns,
Night's sons, frost-spawn,
Foes of mankind,
Who come creeping in from outer space,
Slyly encroaching on the realms of life,
Every winter, when the guardian sun
Has turned his eyes away;
Till round he wheels and sees them,
Impudent trespassers!
Swell with anger,
Starts in pursuit of them.
Quickly they perceive him
Hot on their trail,
And retreat in sullen haste to their home,
The void beyond the ultimate planets,
Where his far-shot arrows, unscathing, fall;
Where frost reigns in absolute tyranny;

Where breath in living lungs would turn to
stone,
And the blood stop short in mid-career
Like a deer pursued by wolves, when, all
in his mad race,
He dashes toward the glade when the Gor-
gons lie sleeping,
And one, roused by the hoof-beats,
Starts up drowsily and stares at him.

There in the mirk
The monsters lurk,
Biding their time,
Waiting their chance,
Which comes again with the changing season.

There are many who hold that as years go by
The sun grows feebler,
The frost-fiends stronger,
Until, in the end inevitable,
Light shall be swallowed by darkness,
Fire by frost,
Life by death.

For the sun is a spender unsparing —
Like the bird of fable, piercing her breast
That her thirsty little ones may drink;
Steadily flows his golden life-blood forth.
But darkness and cold are jealous hoarders.

To such a contest, what end can there be but
one?

A simple question of arithmetic!

Heavy odds against the sun: ten to one, fifty
to one, a thousand to one! And no
takers?

I wonder, now!

Darkness and cold are sluggish, stagnant,
stolid,

But fire is a wily and a mocking thing
Of unexpected resource.

Not yet is the end. Meantime —

The snow-piles sink in the February sun-
shine.

Round the corner of the shed prance four
little boys,

Red-cheeked and glowing.

They seize the fragile, sinister shafts
That hang from the eaves,
Snap them short off,

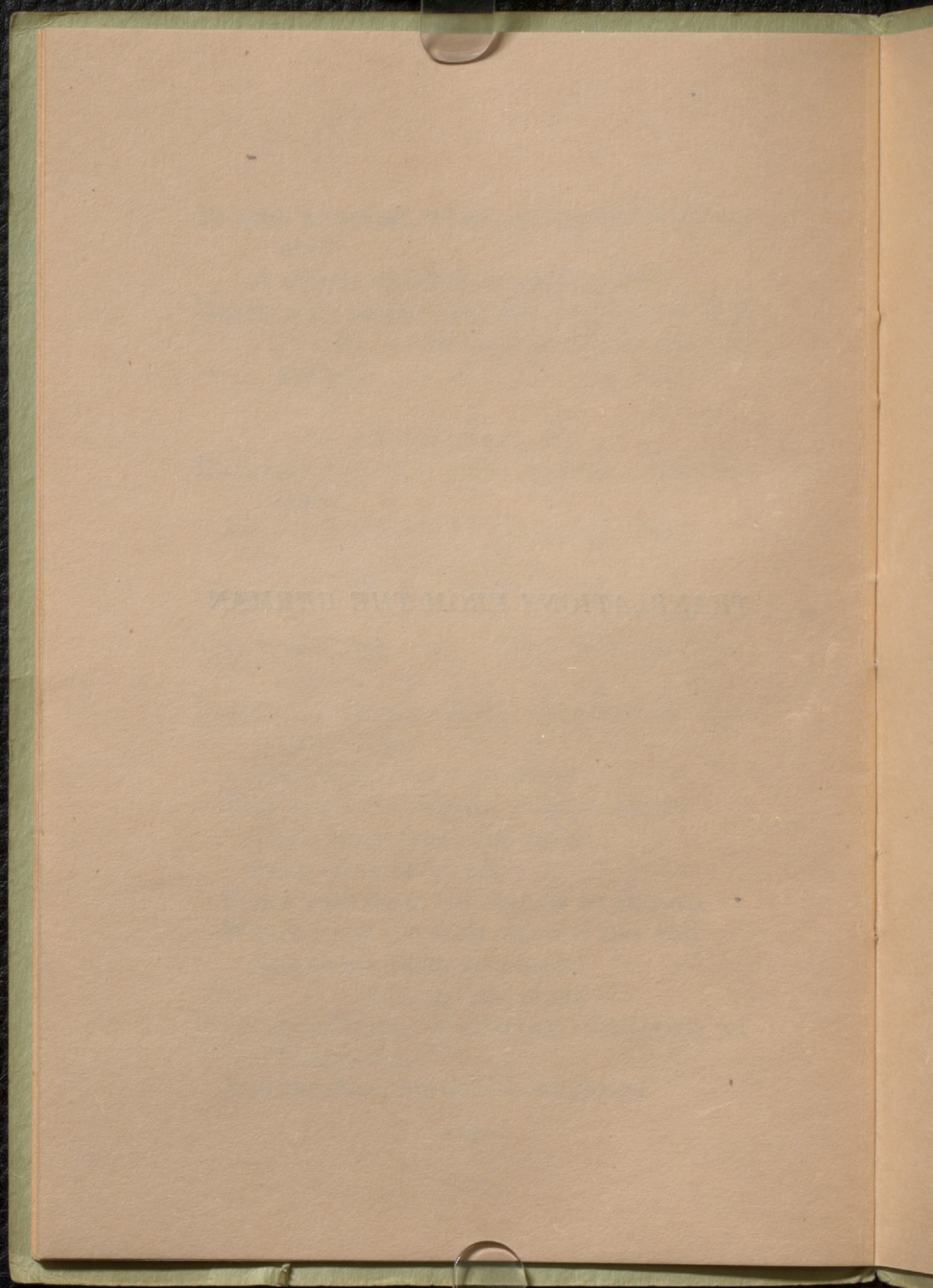
Fence with them till they fly in shivers,
Whack them gleefully against the wall
Just to see them go smash!

How the air rings

With splintering, shattering, clattering of
fragments,

And carefree, hoydenish laughter!

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE GERMAN



THE POPPY FIELD

(*By Gustav Falke*)

It happened once, I know not when
Nor where; perchance 'twas all a dream.
A dark fir wood was passed, and then
I saw a sunny meadow gleam.

And on that silent meadow stood
A host of poppies, motionless.
Brightly extended, many a rood,
Their crimson carpet's loveliness.

And on the crimson carpet lay —
By flower-sentries guarded well —
A beauteous, sleepy summer day,
Dozing beneath some pleasant spell.

A hare came leaping. Then, in fright,
He plunged where thickest blossoms grew,
So close they covered him from sight
That just one ear came peeping through.

Nor sound nor breath. A passing bird
Scarce wakes the lazy afternoon;
His dusky pinions pulse unheard;
Pencilled in air, he dwindles soon.

It happened once, I know not where;
A dream, perhaps. 'Tis long ago,
But still I see the poppies flare,
One silken, soundless, ruby glow.

THE SOLDIER

(By *Adelbert von Chamisso*, from the *Danish*
of *H. C. Andersen*)

The drums are muffled, they throb and stun.
This long, long road! Will it never be done?
I wish it were over, I wish he were gone.
My heart is breaking. The drums beat on.

He was all I loved in the world; and they
Are marching him out to his death to-day.
The troops parade on the trampled sod,
And I am drawn for the firing-squad.

He glances up for a last sight
Of the soft blue sky and the sun's light.
They bandage his eyes; he waits the end.
God give you eternal rest, my friend.

Nine rifles rose at the sergeant's call;
Eight shots struck fire from the high stone
wall —
From hands that were shaking they took
their start:
But I—I shot him, straight through the
heart.

ZARATHUSTRA'S SONG

(By *Friedrich Nietzsche*)

O mortal! hark!

What says the midnight deep and dark?

“From sleep, from sleep

Am I awaked in power stark;

The world is deep,

Yea, deeper far than day did mark.

Deep pain is there;

Joy—deeper still than grief can be,

‘Pass!’ is pain’s prayer;

But joy, it wills eternity —

Profound, profound eternity!”

POESY

(*By Friedrich Schiller*)

Through starry heights supreme, through
 deeps unsounded,
I seek the songs that never yet were heard;
The realm of thought my heritage un-
 bounded,
My wing-projected instrument, the word.
The dreams that lie in Nature's heart un-
 spoken
Must be proclaimed in accents free and
 strong,
The veil be lifted, and the seals be broken;
No bands may check the tameless power of
 song.
But fairest still gleams my desired goal:
Within the lovely form—the lovely soul.

POSTSCRIPT

Why graphite? And why galena?

Well, even a booklet must have its title; and lead-pencil and type metal have both played no small part in the production of this one, as of most others. However, that is not the real reason. I was down on the Driveway here one summer evening. There is rather an interesting view up the canal, with the Laurier Bridge spanning water and tracks in a high black arch, the wide throat of the Union Station gaping beyond, studded with lights, and the towered Chateau dominating it all against a sunset sky. The canal lay too deep between its banks to reflect the color, but its water had the soft, silvery gleam of galena, and in its shadows there was the evasive diamond lustre of graphite. I'd have liked to make a verse or two about it; but two words don't go very far towards a stanza, though they do very nicely for a title.

There are three men whose names should have a place somewhere in this booklet, for it owes its existence largely to them: my

father, William McKenzie of North Bay;
Dr. John Macgillivray of Queen's University,
Kingston; and Dr. O. D. Skelton, of Queen's
and of Ottawa.

I may add that some of the contents have
appeared in Queen's Quarterly, Queen's
Journal, and the former North Bay Despatch.

Marjorie McKenzie.

Ottawa, Canada,
August 2, 1927.

father, William McKinnon of North Bay;
Dr. John Macgillivray of Queen's University,
Kingston; and Dr. O. H. Shelton of Queen's
and of Ottawa.

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